



MacLeavy, J., Fannin, M., & Lerner, W. (2021). Feminism and Futurity: Geographies of Resistance, Resilience and Reworking. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(6), 1558-1579.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211003327>

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# Feminism and futurity: Geographies of resistance, resilience and reworking

Progress in Human Geography

1–22

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## Abstract

This article is designed to stimulate debate over the possibilities for thinking feminist futures. It argues for moving away from a linear understanding of feminism which assumes that past feminism produces present and future feminism as a response to its previous waves. Instead, we argue for embracing the multiplicity and simultaneity of contemporary *feminisms*, taking inspiration from Elizabeth Grosz's writings on futurity and Cindi Katz's work on resistance, resilience and reworking. Drawing on Katz's framing, we review three analytically distinct ways of conceptualising feminist politics and consider how feminist geographers are asking new questions of familiar domains, as well as finding gender formations and political possibilities in unexpected empirical sites. In doing so, we point to the contemporary relevance of feminist scholarship and politics, and affirm feminism's ongoing importance.

## Keywords

feminism, feminist geography, futurity, gender, politics, temporality

## 1 Introduction

In the wake of recent debates over the future of feminism in academia (Fannin et al., 2014; Larner et al., 2013; MacLeavy et al., 2016; Peake, 2015, 2016), this article explores the possibilities for thinking feminist futures. In particular, it responds to Louise Amoore's (2020) observation that despite the uptake of feminist vocabularies, experiences and practices within the discipline, there is a continued annexing of feminist and gender-sensitive scholarship in mainstream human geography, which risks foreclosing the inherently political possibilities to know, act and

inhabit space and social networks differently. Amoore rearticulates Judith Butler's landmark critique that while the production of gendered relations has been the focus of vigorous debate, a distinction between the 'material' and the 'cultural' is still traced in work that locates certain gendered oppressions as somehow outside of political economy. For instance, normative

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heterosexuality and its genders are typically seen as central to the reproduction of capitalism, whereas homosexuality and bisexuality, as well as transgender, are confined to the 'cultural sphere' with little recognition of the ways in which their production is also essential to the functioning of contemporary capitalism (Butler, 1997). If masculinity and femininity – and relatedly the gender binary based on the assumption that there are only two distinct, opposite genders – are conceived in stable form, Butler argues, other modes of subordination (race, sexuality) that co-produce the modalities in and through which gender is lived are marginalised or debased. And with them, the promise of politicisation that arises when 'one social movement comes to find its conditions of possibility in another' (Butler, 1997: 269).

Building further on Butler's intervention, this article positions the transformative work of feminist and queer scholars 'to bring into existence things and ideas which did not exist before' (Dean, 2010: 53) as part of a prefigurative strategy that recognises, theorises and supports the many ways that people around the world shape the relations of power in and through which they live their daily lives (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2020). In doing so, it seeks to move beyond the (often) pessimistic or dismissive prognoses of feminism found in public discourse and academic commentary whenever feminism is viewed as a static or singular project and celebrate the myriad ways in which geographers engage with modes of being and becoming. Conceptually, the research we discuss in this essay does not focus on women as a unitary category, nor does it necessarily privilege gender (or the social understandings of differences between men and women, or masculinity and femininity) over other conceptual frames. Instead, we draw on work that is attentive to the present as a terrain of politics and uses empirical analyses to investigate the articulation of an undefined and unknowable time in which futurity – a term Elizabeth Grosz

uses to construct 'becoming' theoretically – is not conditioned or restricted by the patriarchal arrangements of the present and the past (Grosz, 2002, 2005). This orientation towards a multi-linear and multidimensional model of time is intended to denaturalise commonplace narratives of feminism's generational 'waves' that designate a chronological reading of political struggles and recognise the existence of continuity and discontinuity in practices over time. In seeking to highlight the diversity of feminist consciousness, methods and activism that is obscured by the presentation of a singular feminist trajectory, we consider in turn the spatial-temporal dynamics of resistance, resilience and reworking. These three 'Rs' allow us to grasp the complex relationship between different social movements as well as the theoretical significance of an alternative and more generative way of interpreting the many pasts, presents and futures of feminism.

Our approach has two objectives. First, in recognising that the feminist intellectual project includes but also extends beyond the 'political movement for the liberation of women and society based on the equality of all people' (Mackay, 2013: 2), we are keen not to restrict our focus to scholarship that is concerned with rights, recognition and redistribution established through a foundational political structure. We wish to also explore the proliferation of geographical analyses of feminism and more recently new materialism that afford new understandings of biology and matter. In bringing 'the natural' into the purview of feminist critique, 'new materialist geographies' extend the work of scholars like Butler (1990, 1993) on the ontological status of gender and sexuality. Implicit in Butler's (1993) work is a recognition of the productive dimensions of language and other social practices and the idea that these can change how biology, bodies and matter are materialised and come to have meaning or significance in our everyday lives (Rahman and Witz, 2003). New materialist feminisms follow Butler's attention to the importance of

matter and practice but critique how many of her readers tend to reduce corporeality to cultural discussions (Hird, 2004). Within geography, calls to attend to matter as a means of ensuring feminist engagement with ecological and biological worlds have seen scholars deploy a feminist and intersectional approach to the study of new and interdisciplinary concerns (e.g. Boyer and Spinney, 2016; Last, 2017; Mollett and Faria, 2013; Wilson, 1998; Yusoff, 2018). The use of tools provided by feminist theory within the domains of ecology or science and technology studies, for instance, expands the realm of feminist geography such that sexual difference ‘is no longer foundational, no longer the difference from which all other (given) differences are effected’ (Colebrook, 2000: 118, quoted in Hird, 2004). New materialist work importantly reminds us that matter is active, mobile and subject to constant, dynamic change. As but one example of how feminist geography has ‘reconfigured and amplified what counts as politics and the political in contemporary geography’ (Amoore, 2020: 2), this alerts us to the intrinsic potential of analyses that generate novel ideas about the future. Not only does this work challenge any presumption of fixity in prevailing practices and forms of knowledge, but it also problematises assumptions of feminist transformation over time by positioning political formations and subject positions as radically ambiguous, rather than stable and fated.

Second, invocations of post-feminism (e.g. Aronson, 2003; Brooks, 1997; Gill, 2016) have coincided with calls to reckon with a ‘fourth wave’ of feminist activism and politics, characterised but not rigidly defined by the highly mediated presence of ‘celebrity feminists’, the growth of online activism and the influence of social media, and the emergence of intersectionality into mainstream cultural discourse on difference (Rivers, 2017). These calls demonstrate how the notion of waves continues to shape thinking about feminism’s past, present and future, lending itself to the characterisation of

feminist thought and politics, as one wave ends and a new begins, through notions of successive patterns of feminist decline, co-option or repudiation. The notion of feminism’s waves also tends to identify a generation’s feminism with a singular focus, for example, in viewing suffrage and access to the formal political sphere as primarily a first-wave feminist concern, or reproductive rights as primarily a preoccupation of the second wave (e.g. Eisenstein, 2009; Fraser, 2009). These commonplace depictions of each wave’s political struggles also ignore practices of gendered resistance by black and indigenous women, constructing a white-centric genealogy of feminism that also obscures how abolitionist and anti-racist political movements informed white feminist political strategies and tactics (Springer, 2002). By contrast, queer theoretical work on alternative temporalities suggests the possibilities opened up by reworking the genealogies of feminism as a developmental series of waves, a metaphor that mimics the heteronormative temporalities of reproduction and obscures the temporal short-circuits that may link different forms of activism in time and space (Freeman, 2010; Halberstam, 2005). As Michelle Bastian (2011) argues, linear models of Western feminism’s waves and the characterisation of each wave as a distinct stage in feminist political consciousness profoundly depoliticise differences between feminists. Furthermore, in relying on notions of progress, generational narratives of feminist history tend to reinstate colonial forms of temporal distancing and maintain the hegemony of Western feminism. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, Bastian calls for a more nuanced and radical notion of both time and space in which ‘dislocating space and disjointed time enable multiple histories, loyalties and modes of acting to exist simultaneously’ (2011: 164).

While a thorough excavation of the implications of the continuing use of ‘waves’ to describe feminism’s history is beyond the scope of this article (see Browne, 2014), we want to

signal here our discomfort with describing feminism's history, and by extension its present and its future, through the language of first, second and third wave (and so on), and offer an alternative conceptual frame. We acknowledge that the language of waves provides an ordering device for emphasising how feminists unsettle the objects and subjects of feminists in the past, but at a cost. Underwritten by notions of linear progress and generational transmission, the language of waves, as Bastian and others argue, tends to contain feminist scholarship to particular spaces and moments, curtailing its capacity to transform alongside of, simultaneous with and in succession to other discourses, knowledges and practices.

To be clear, our critique of the metaphors and devices we use to describe feminism's history is not an attempt to minimise or dispense with the gains made by feminist activists and scholars who have created, struggled and acted to transform the worlds in which we live. In feminist geography, the language of waves has had less of a disciplining effect than in accounts of feminist activism's history. Feminist geographers have effectively questioned the predominance of masculinist approaches to research and teaching and fought hard for greater representation and diversity of women in the academy. Yet adopting a chronological approach to time – as we and others argue the metaphor of feminism's waves tends to do – can give rise to anxieties about the scope and status of feminist geography (e.g. Bondi, 2002; Desbiens, 1999) that are refracted when we think of time as a dynamic force and feminist geography as a cross-historical, multifarious project. By privileging a view of time as duration whereby we see time as open to futurity, so that the present is not simply determined by the past but is unrestricted and always becoming, we seek to position feminist geographical endeavours as open, wide-ranging and in flux. There are not cut and dried moments where it is easy to separate what is feminist geography from what it is not and who

is inside from who is outside of the project. Indeed, one of the most salient critiques of the writing of feminism's history as one of successive 'waves' is that much of the energy brought to chronicling these waves presumes intergenerational antagonism, rather than the 'agonistic plurality' that more aptly characterises feminist politics over time and space. Grosz's (2002, 2005) approach, as we discuss in more detail here, proffers a way to transcend the confinement of feminism to a particular kind of academic engagement directed primarily at overcoming or reversing the limits of a previous 'generation' and instead speaks to the forces that are emergent and open-ended within feminist thought and politics.

As an alternative to the language of waves, we seek instead in this article to articulate an understanding of feminism that moves away from notions of linear progression which assume that past feminism produces present and future feminism as a continuation of the previous waves and that the ultimate horizon of feminism's future is a world in which feminism is no longer needed. In the following section, we expand our reading of Elizabeth Grosz's thinking on time and matter to suggest that Grosz's reworking of time offers an alternative mode of conceptualising feminism's horizon as the ongoing 'mobilization and opening up of identity to an uncontained and unpredictable future' (2005: 167). We then turn to an alternative geographical heuristic of political engagement taken from Cindi Katz's work on globalisation to outline three different overtures in feminist geography – resistance, resilience and reworking (2001a; see also Katz, 2004). We draw on Katz's framework to consider the simultaneity of feminist orientations and explore in each section how contemporary feminist work challenges forms of resistance, resilience and reworking in important ways. We argue that within the multiplicity and variability of contemporary feminisms is evidence of a 'reorientation of knowledge practices to the emergent

and the prospective (what has not-yet become)' (Anderson, 2017: 594). No longer bound to find what is already 'known' about the existence and capacities of (at least) two sexes, feminist scholarship attempts to apprehend ongoing, undeveloped situations as a means of taking us beyond current understandings of the past and of imagining and creating futures beyond those represented and opposed in the present; it offers up 'a politics of indeterminacy, or a politics without guarantees' (Nagar, 2014: 13). This has significance for conceptualising feminist geography's political undertakings and allows us to point to the potential for different forms of encounter within feminist geography's anticipatory politics. It is in these future-oriented politics that we also observe temporal imaginings of the 'otherwise'.

## II Beyond the Wave Metaphor: The Times and Spaces of Feminist Scholarship

We begin from the observation that in Anglophone geography, feminism is too often seen as the politics of another place and time. In this view, the early days of feminist geographical scholarship afforded primacy to social and economic relations in analyses of issues involving bodies and sexual difference. The uptake of post-structuralist and new materialist epistemologies is seen to have challenged the centrality of economic analysis and related issues of injustice within feminist geography. At the same time, the implicit assumption that feminist scholarship has effectively exposed the gendered dimensions of space and place (Hanson and Pratt, 1995; McDowell and Sharp, 1997) and subjected the masculinist orthodoxies in the discipline to substantial critique (McDowell, 1993; Rose, 1993, 1997), albeit from a position which reflects the privilege of white, Western scholars (Liu, 2006; Mahtani, 2006; Pulido, 2002), has meant that feminism is often viewed as 'yesterday's scholarship' – as having either

achieved its aims (a position Schurr et al., 2020 also caution against) or, having exhausted its critical repertoire, as being marginal to the central concerns of various subfields (Werner et al., 2017).

By some readings, the transformation of feminist geography from an overtly political project into a 'disciplinary formation' (Brown, 2001) is a measure of success (Johnson, 2008; Walby, 2011). However, given the 'significant and persuasive challenges' that destabilise the categories of women, gender and sex (Coddington, 2015: 219), the means by which contemporary geographical scholarship fulfils the overtly political aim of the *feminist* movement has been questioned. Indeed, the disaggregation of the category 'woman' brought about by black, queer, postcolonial and post-structuralist feminist approaches should make it impossible for scholars working within the field to write in a monolithic way about women without obscuring how injustice and inequality are sexed, gendered and racialised. In the context of a significant revival of feminist protest and activism that has seen popular discourse around feminism move from the question of 'Is it all over?' (Aronson, 2003; Baguley, 2002; Grey and Sawyer, 2008) to the emergence of transnational feminist campaigns such as the #MeToo movement and the Everyday Sexism Project (Mansfield et al., 2019), women's marches against Trump, Bolsonaro and other authoritarian political figures, and the uptake of concepts developed by black feminists such as intersectionality into wider public discourse (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Mollett and Faria, 2018), the seeming retreat from a gendered subject has led to claims of a growing divide between feminist organising and the expansion of a feminist identity and feminist scholarship (see Dean and Aune, 2015).

Of particular interest here is the manner in which continuity and change in feminist practice is so often denoted in generational chronological time, using a wave-based metaphor that formalises representations of geographical

research into particular phases (see also Cullen and Fischer, 2014). Moreover, a feminist geography concerned with the structural position of women is conceptualised as coming *before* a non-categorical approach in which there is understood to be no ‘internal coherence of gender’ (Butler, 1990: 44). In this, time is reduced to space and spatialisation, with new currents of feminist theorising, such as new materialist geographies, predominantly identified as located in the UK and US (given the epistemic dominance of academia in these nations) with the implicit assumption that the rest of the academy is *behind* in the process of following the ‘arrow of directionality’ (Grosz, 2002: 16). Such narratives, although borne from a desire to think through the intellectual depths of the feminist project, are problematic insofar as they use time to simplify and obscure how different modes of feminist enquiry change (as past research endeavours may condition an infinite number of practices, what emerges is only one line of possibility from the past). The geographical inferences also tend to reflect a Western viewpoint that denies the existence of many simultaneous feminisms and the many instances when feminist politics transcends borders and states, such that any effort to locate feminist geography empirically is considered to transform its nature by reducing it to a mode of spatiality. On this point, we share Dean’s (2012) concern that the expression of ‘loss’ of a past feminism, an expression to which some commentators are affectively attached, obscures the vibrancy and resurgent qualities of its contemporary forms.

As Grosz (building on the writings of philosophers Luce Irigaray and Gilles Deleuze) notes in her discussion of feminist epistemology, the nature of the present and the different entities and categories that exist within the present are simultaneously shaped by the past and future, both of which need to be attended to critically in order to reveal ‘the proliferation of alternative and different discourses, knowledges, frames of reference and political investments’ available

within feminism (2005: 175). In her discussion, Grosz uses the example of sexual difference to outline the political importance of countering a neutral (male) position in order to reveal new and emergent forms of subjectivity (see also Grosz, 2012). Like Irigaray, she is primarily concerned not with what this sexual difference might consist of or how it might manifest itself (a concern reflected in the question posed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*: ‘what is a woman?’) but rather with how sexual difference is occluded in the present and may become the means for defining different modes of being and becoming in the future. Sexual difference for Grosz is a concept that ‘entails the existence of *at least two* points of views, sets of interests, perspectives’ (Grosz, 2002: 14, emphasis in original). It is the absence of engagement with this *indeterminable difference* that forms the basis of Grosz’s project given that at best ‘sexual difference has only existed in its reduced form as forms of sameness, opposition or complementarity between the two sexes, in which woman has been understood only in some relation to man as a known entity (as more or less equal, more or less dependent, more or less autonomous relative to a norm provided by men)’ (Grosz, 2012: 72). There is a specificity proper to this difference, but it is open-ended and emergent, and Grosz (1998: 41) describes this as the idea of ‘direction without destination, movement without prediction’.

In troubling the sense of a known directionality and determined future for a political movement like feminism, Grosz acknowledges that there are also risks and even dangers. What if the undetermined and open-ended future, unknowable and undecidable in the present, were to become worse rather than better? She suggests that all political movements, including feminism, that seem to advocate most strongly for progress and liberatory change also seem most wary of the notion of an open-ended future. But Grosz’s reading of an ontology of becoming is necessary as part of a feminist

project to bring the future into existence, not by programming it in advance but by creating and inventing it. For this, Grosz (2005: 179) suggests moving beyond critique as part of 'feminism's own self-overcoming, its movement from policing to production, its self-expansion into the terrain of knowledge production'. Grosz's attention to 'alternative scripts or inscriptions' of sexual identity resonates here with feminist geographical work that reveals how language does not simply describe the world but may instead (or also) function as a form of social action. For instance, J-K Gibson-Graham's work seeks to open up contemporary capitalist morphologies of dominance through exploration of the multiplicity of economic spaces and situations occluded by a single, neutral universal model of the economy (1996: 136). Within the present, Gibson-Graham (2006) argues, capitalist practices are but one of the many forms and formations being imagined and enacted. Linked to this recognition is the necessity of providing other ways of knowing and narrating the economy as a means of transforming the relations we hold with ourselves, the world and the future (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). We see in new materialist approaches an effort to go further in interrogating the limits of language and representation by exploring 'things-in-themselves' as materialities and forces (Daya, 2019: 361). Cultivating new feminist geographical knowledges by taking up the work of Irigaray (often in relation to Deleuze), scholars investigate the nature and potential of bodies and matter beyond their ideological articulations and discursive inscriptions (e.g. Colls, 2012). By adopting a focus on materialities, affects and enactment in specific spaces and places, they are able to include questions of how feminist sensibilities shape analyses, including when the objects of study are neither explicitly 'about' women or gender.

The use of feminist tools to explore the material illustrates how 'thinking through things' (Henare et al., 2007: 1) can enable new

understandings of time and becoming. Positioned against work that renders material things as either constructed (and thereby only intelligible in relation to something else) or singular (that is fixed, settled or passive), these studies foster alternative subjectivities as a political enterprise that does not simply illuminate that which is already in existence. Indeed, new materialism goes further in questioning how certain existences are determined through their relationship with another and thinks through what an 'unknown' subject/difference might be or be capable of as a productive act (Colls, 2012: 440). In recognising that 'the material realm is fundamentally agential', it focuses on how relations between and with living and non-living others can multiply possibilities for action (Daya, 2019: 370). In terms of politics, this provides a route for feminist geographers, in particular, to expand what Butler calls 'performative force' (Butler, 1993: 227) and to envision opportunities for inventing alternative knowledges, ontologies and pathways towards an undetermined future.

In what follows, we outline a basis for challenging narratives of feminism's 'passing', which are conceived by equating time with linear progress and overlooking the capricious ways in which 'the new' is brought into being (compare Adkins, 2004; Hemmings, 2005; McRobbie, 2007). As mentioned previously, we employ Katz's (2001a) heuristic of feminist political engagement to navigate through geographical studies that revisit familiar but perhaps taken-for-granted spheres of political possibility as well as those that attend to hitherto unfamiliar terrains. The feminist scholarship to which we refer is characterised by an empiricism in which specific sites and cases (the 'geo') are used to do theoretical work. Rather than positioning the empirical case as somehow less than or other to 'theory', these projects draw out conceptual claims from quite detailed and fine-grained empirical study. Methodologically, this requires getting closer to one's subjects of research, whether through personal biography (as a means



of grappling with what Grosz (2002: 17) terms ‘many simultaneous durations, which participate in a generalized or cosmological duration’), or through grappling with how to resist one’s own nostalgia (which blurs the difference between past and present within duration), or through a recognition of the often-seductive nature of various forms of knowing and living (which we might think of as a determinism that necessarily reduces the future to the present occluding ‘the openness of becoming that enables divergence from what exists’ (p. 18)). We focus on work that deploys process-oriented, situated approaches that position readers in the midst of an author’s thinking and their search for how to grapple with the heterogeneity of the transformations playing out in their respective fields. In doing so, we resist calls to revitalise explanation as a central purpose of geographical analysis (e.g. Yeung, 2019) and follow Katz in attending to the emergent powers or possibilities that signal the potential for realising feminist futures.

### III Geographies of Resistance, Resilience and Reworking

Katz (2001a, 2001b) proposes the use of ‘countertopographies’ as a way of revisioning the future and as a method for developing other ways of being in the world. While topographies produce ‘deliberate, purposeful, and systematic – albeit partial information’ in planning and military strategy, as well as in geography (Katz, 2001b: 720), the notion of countertopographies offers as a means of analysing the constellation of social relations encountered in various locations, exploring how these are known to connect to each other and inferring unexamined/unknown connections in between. Created by redeploying topography’s tools to link places analytically, the production of countertopographies enables movement beyond research encounters ‘made artifactually discrete by virtue of history and geography’ in order to develop a better understanding of the ‘contours’

of particular processes and imagine different kinds of responses to these (Katz, 2001a: 1229). Katz’s specific aim is to move past the local/global conceptualisations that prevailed in the discipline through the act of (re)mapping research observations of social dynamics in New York City to social relations and practices in eastern central Sudan. In doing so, she seeks to demonstrate how (re)mapping space can contribute to (re)forming positive social relations that acknowledge, rather than reject, the iterations and effects of economic restructuring across different locales. Importantly, she argues, countertopographies can be used to enhance political struggles:

In many ways this [method] builds an oppositional politics on the basis of situated knowledges . . . [it] builds upon feminist and Marxist insights concerning exploitation, oppression, and power – [but it goes further in recognising] that the language of site and situatedness has tended to facilitate a collapse of dimensionality rather than its opposite. (Katz, 2001a: 1230).

Katz’s important intervention thus offers an alternative theoretical conception of political engagement that can move across scale and space.

For this article, Katz’s effort to ‘get beyond the various cul-de-sacs of identification’ that lead to ‘a politics of “sites” and “spaces” from which materiality is largely evacuated’ powerfully illustrates the generative capacities of feminist theory (2001a: 1230). In particular, the analytically distinct local responses to the spatial–temporal transformations underlying global integration/globalisation, which she terms resistance, resilience and reworking, provide a means for us to distinguish between diverse, contextually varied forms of feminism. For Katz, *resistance* denotes a form of oppositional consciousness; *resilience* refers to strategies of endurance that people adopt to facilitate their day-to-day living, but which do not really change the circumstances which make their

lives difficult; and *reworking* is related to the broader restructuring of the conditions in which people live and the political possibilities that emerge from the restructuring process. We consider resistance, resilience and reworking, in turn, to demonstrate how contemporary geographical scholarship reveals the creative, affirmative, performative moments through which new ways of being in the world are being identified. Then, we discuss the extent to which this work provides for different forms of spatial and political attentiveness. We explore how these different conceptual frames for imagining feminist theoretical and political currents are simultaneous to each other.

## I Resistance

Resistance is perhaps the most familiar understanding of what feminist political engagement has made possible. It emerges from a conventional and idealised notion of oppositional practices as predetermined, intentional and recognisable. Within geography, this has been manifest in accounts of resistant forms that are ‘delineated a priori’ (Hughes, 2019: 2), with grand narratives of subjects working against the state and capital, against dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, and other elaborations of resistant politics where people are assumed to have a fixed position relative to a particular configuration of power. Challenges to heroic conceptions of resistance underscore the complexity of locating and situating resistance: Katherine McKittrick’s (2006: 69) powerful account of the geographies of black femininity explores how resistance on the slave auction block is also bound up with ‘pain, regulation and subjugation’ in an inextricable simultaneity of the geographies of unfreedom and struggle. Recent scholarship in political geography also troubles the notion of resistance as a sustained, directed and (often) organised practice, thereby unsettling, in Matt Sparke’s (2008: 423) language, ‘the basic idea of resistance [as] people

“pushing back” by tracing (in)actions in their emergent becoming. As Sarah Hughes (2019: 1142) outlines, rather than be ‘wedded to particular coordinates – of intention, linearity, opposition – that serve to determine in advance what comes to be termed as resistance’ such work seeks to account for seemingly unremarkable practices, the implications of which are not fully known in the present. Giving the example of a participant in the 2017 Women’s March on the streets of Washington DC, Hughes explains that this participant ‘could not fully know what claim she was making *now*, nor the conditions of possibility for *future* claims that her participation in the march was creating’ (2019: 1141, emphasis in original). To account for this, she argues, geographers need to expand from thinking of resistance as *form* to engaging with ‘resistance in *emergence*’, as undetermined but nevertheless immanent to the exercise of power relations (2019: 1143, our emphasis).

Hughes’ provocation that geographers need to recognise and research resistance without recourse to a predetermined form resonates with feminist activism that approaches resistance not as an oppositional dialectic but as something immanent to everyday relationships, which works through prioritising ‘critical connections over critical mass’ (Brown, 2017). By tracing resistance as it comes into being, this work allows for the constant state of movement and the transformation that actors, both human and non-human, undergo not least as a consequence of their interconnections (what Katz terms ‘contour lines’ that condition experiences in different locations). Emergence is also necessarily tied to novelty and the future (both of which Grosz insists are at the unspoken heart of feminist politics); it grasps how moments of the past endure, assembling with present and future temporalities (Coleman, 2008).

One such example of resistance as emergent practice can be found in policy practitioner Jane Foot’s (2010) account of her career working ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of government. Her

personal reflections on the difficult and antagonistic, but also productive, alignments between activism, informal labour and governmental projects track how feminist activism prefigured the channelling of state resources into projects of inclusion, participation and empowerment (Newman, 2013: 215; see also Cruikshank, 1999). Newman cites these alignments as examples of the feminist ‘border work’ that does not conform to an (expected) form yet conditions the possibilities for making future claims. In her account, feminist activism takes place in interstitial spaces, where particular actions or actors are entangled with (as opposed to external to) the forces of power that shape the way in which lives are lived and work is conducted. Refuting conceptions of resistance and power as a dualism, whereby resistance is framed as a force opposing a monolithic structure (such as patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity or capitalism), Foot’s testimony bears witness to ‘agentic subjects’ (qua Thrift, 2007) who operate across multiple politicised domains. Recognising that individuals and groups may not act in any definitive way – as practices emerge through a ‘tangled array of forces’ (Allen and Cochrane, 2010: 1073) and are not necessarily coherent – necessarily changes the way in which resistance is conceived. Narratives of exploitation, oppression and inequality found within (neo) Marxist accounts give way to new understandings of how the subjects of resistant politics are imbricated in conditions that give rise to the struggles in which they engage (Sharp et al., 2000). As such, ‘co-option’ becomes understood as always-already present and resistance as not just fighting back or opposition *per se* but the everyday challenges that people make through modifications of their individual relationships to the prevailing order (Pile and Keith, 1997: xi).

For geographers, the reframing of resistance as emergence has allowed for a greater appreciation of ‘modest’ or ‘quiet’ actions that can destabilise forces and temporalities (Hughes, 2019). Paying close attention to ‘gently subversive,

interpersonal or creative acts’ reveals the ‘political orientations and potentialities [that] exist beyond spectacular, formally organised forms of protest’ (Pottinger, 2017: 215–216; see also Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Horton and Kraftl, 2009). The literature on women’s entrepreneurialism offers one such site, exploring the complex navigation of patriarchal and neoliberal economic imperatives by subjects less often viewed as agents of resistance. For example, Marieme S Lo (2016) recounts how Senegalese women entrepreneurs involved in transnational microenterprise trade in New York develop creative strategies to resist their own subjugation in markets shaped by gendered assumptions held by other traders and customers (and also by researchers focused solely on men as transnational market actors). In this vein, Harriet Bradley’s (2010) discussion of cupcake club salons in London, aimed at savvy, entrepreneurial women who seek to apply their business acumen to the creation of services for other mothers (often women who are taking a break from successful careers to engage in care-work), raises the question of how resistance might be more complexly framed: rather than simply a lifestyle choice, are these instances of women resisting masculine models of entrepreneurship by capitalising on the market for specialty goods and services catering to other commodity-conscious mothers? Such forms of experimentation with forging alternative economic livelihoods are not unfamiliar to working-class and racialised women combining work and care out of circumstances constrained by necessity but also buoyed by invention and creativity (Morrow and Parker, 2020). Maureen Molloy and Wendy Lerner (2013) make a similar argument in their analysis of the designer fashion industry in New Zealand, in which they examine the rise to prominence of a group of young, largely self-employed, women designers. Yet they note the phenomena of women’s entrepreneurship could also be interpreted as a form of adaptation: as women just getting by given the structural constraints that face working mothers

despite existing social welfare provisions and the gains of feminist efforts to ensure equal pay (see also Perrier and Fannin, 2016). Implicit here are questions pertaining to intentionality and agency, not as fixed forms but as processual achievements, for ‘no one can presume to have the ability (or the right) to fully prescribe what resistance might look or feel like for anyone else (nor, indeed, our future selves)’ (Hughes, 2019: 4). These insights are also reflected in feminist geographical scholarship on emergent practices of political and ecological resistance, in all their ‘incompletion, incongruence and multiplicity’ (Ey, 2021: 3). Resistance as emergence is productive insofar as it provides for a means of thinking about political subjectivity as a modality that *shifts constantly*. In privileging processual rather than predetermined accounts of how people contribute to political goals, the conception of resistance as emergence reveals how the business-savvy women in the examples above are neither wholly atomised and hyper-rational ‘flexible’ agents, nor women entrepreneurs simply surviving in the margins of the highly competitive, portfolio workforce, and pushes us to consider the very terms within which they (and the researchers who study them) are constrained by cultural configurations of the feminine.

## 2 Resilience

Resilience – or the ‘living-on’ or ‘living-in’ the context of flux and uncertainty – is the focus of a plethora of feminist scholarship, two decades on from Katz’s (2001a) text. New narratives of economy and work (James, 2017) and citizenship and care (Roseneil, 2013) point to the capacity to be resilient as both a resource and a form of governmental reasoning. Alongside these complex configurations of resilience, community is identified as a locus for activism and labour (Jupp, 2012), rather than a space discrete from the state and economy. Resilience is also part of new ways of thinking about the relationships between feminism, faith and

family (Staeheli, 2013) that do not rely on accounts of vehement secularism. Resilience is used to describe people making their own histories (and geographies) but not under conditions of their own choosing. In such accounts, it is clear that ‘resilience holds out the promise of living with and even benefiting from change, uncertainty and vulnerability’ (Grove and Chandler, 2017: 81), opening up questions about the possibilities afforded by the ‘structural and personal strengthening of subjective and material arrangements so as to be better able to anticipate and tolerate disturbances’ (Lentzos and Rose, 2009: 243), and their political ramifications.

Whereas for Katz (2001a), resilience is related to the strategies of endurance (such as rural cosmopolitanism, migration, postponing marriage and child-rearing) that people adopt to facilitate their day-to-day living, but which do not really change the circumstances that make their lives difficult, in recent years we have seen resilience emerge as a political goal (Walker and Cooper, 2011). For example, in geography Evans et al. (2009) have argued that resilience resonates with neoliberal discourses of capitalism, whereas others see this new approach as the basis for an environmental politics of progressive social movements (Swyngedouw, 2014). More recently, Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson (2013) have offered the concept of ‘resourcefulness’ as an alternative to the discourse of resilience inherited from complex systems theory. According to them, the transformation of resilience from a natural science to a social science category brings with it the risk that resilience works to maintain, rather than overcome, existing forms of social and spatial injustice. In other domains, feminist rhetorics of resilience offer the potential for recognising (human and non-human) connectedness and relationality, a reading that moves resilience some way from its association with an innate capacity for survival (Flynn et al., 2012). There

are conflicting accounts of the political significance of resilience as a new way of being in the world. The polysemic nature of the term resilience and the existence of conflicting accounts of its significance exposes the political – specifically feminist political – capacities of the concept, even as they call for critical interrogation of the conditions that make becoming resilient necessary for survival.

New ambitions to promote resilient subjects arise from a rethinking of the coordinates of subjectivity such that the subject is understood to emerge through and with the world, not separate and sovereign as it is configured within the fixed spatial and temporal ontology of modernity. There is also no longer an imagined authority who is directing and controlling society heedless of external challenge (the contrast here is with geographers such as James Evans, 2011). We argue that resilience is not neoliberalism as we know and have theorised it. Contra to interpretations of resilience as exemplifying neoliberal efforts to liberate social and ecological systems from the control of the interventionist state (as citizens come to accept that ‘complex systems internalize and neutralize all external challenges to their existence, transforming perturbation into an endogenous feature of the system’, rather than a failure of public management and state planning), resilience is seen to (re)constitute various sites of community (Walker and Cooper, 2011: 157). In positioning risk, uncertainty, flexibility not just as new *reflections* of changing global economic, political and cultural conditions but rather as *generative* of new forms of governance and new techniques of power, we suggest that the new emphasis on resilience is both after governmentality (as analytic) and after neoliberalism (as politics). It does not rest on the presupposition of a ‘resilient subject’ but rather evokes a wider set of subjectivities, enabling us to recognise points of transgression that a reading of resilience as an ‘exemplary feature’ of the neoliberal era might pass over (Grove and Chandler, 2017).

In this light, feminism and feminist scholarship are critical to understanding the valence of resilience as a form of government and norm to which economies, communities and individuals are compelled to aspire. This conceptualisation of resilience draws on feminist post-structural understandings of subjectivity, as well as recent psychosocial discussions of the subject as “‘unfinished,” or constantly in a process of becoming or remaking’ (Aranda et al., 2012). Readers will no doubt be familiar with the well-rehearsed discussion of neoliberal subjectivities in which contractualism and calculative practices foster responsabilisation. But resilient subjects are not simply new versions of the individualised subjects imagined by neoliberalism; they are not the entrepreneurialised rational subjects that drive both production and consumption, nor are they reducible to the geneticised subjects imagined by neuroscience and behavioural economics (Cretney and Bond, 2014; McRobbie, 2020). Resilient subjects are ‘situated, mutable and dynamic’, called into being by different imaginaries of the present and future and the tactics and strategies deployed to intervene and govern them (Hill and Lerner, 2017). Resilient subjects are also imagined as self-sustaining, collectivised, creators of ‘everyday utopias’ (Cooper, 2013) who in doing so create alternative environmental, economic and social futures. An example of this understanding of the resilient subject as performative rather than stable or socially constituted is found in Nancy Ettlinger’s (2007: 320) work on the observed links between labour regimes and terrorism. Resilience, Ettlinger argues, is based on multiple networked dynamics and cooperative forms of politics where participating in, rather than opposing, governance is what is needed in an unpredictable world. Similarly, in a reflection on the global environmental crisis and purported arrival of the Anthropocene, J-K Gibson-Graham (2011: 4) asks us ‘to recognise that we are all participants in a “becoming world” in which everything is interconnected and

learning happens in a stumbling, trial and error kind of way'. Gibson-Graham argues for what they call 'new adventures in living' that trigger self-organising resilient local economies and empowered subjects that can underpin a new mode of humanity. Their emphasis on resilience as self-organising can be seen as part of a more general move towards community-led, ground-up initiatives that has displaced the former dependence on states, professionals and technocrats mobilising resources as an operational strategy of risk management.<sup>1</sup> These initiatives emphasise new collective survival strategies to counter unpredictability and vulnerability, which are likely to have many varied effects.

To this extent, resilience may also mark a change in our understanding of the present. It forces us to confront 'not only an unknowable future, but to also recognise . . . a beyond to the known in the present' (Grove and Chandler, 2017: 83). At a basic level, this idea of resilience 'posits an emergent temporality that . . . leaves the subject exposed' (Grove and Chandler, 2017: 83). It does not rest on the presupposition of the individual actor making rational choices but rather emphasises the role of groups and networks in developing *experimental* strategies for living in an uncertain world. Privileging reflexivity and social relationships (Fineman, 2008), such resilience thinking signals an important shift away from the liberal subject (or at least from an individualised rights-based frame of government) to consider how material bodies, spaces and conditions contribute to the formation of subjectivity. Thus, we see resilience feature in feminist accounts of the capacity to persevere and thrive despite institutional forms of sexism and racism (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). Reflecting on the logics of resilience in black feminist social life in New Orleans, Laura McTighe and Deon Haywood (2018) chart how resilience references both endurance and survival in the face of gendered and racialised oppression and conversely becomes a slogan proposed by city officials and

commercial developers to describe the conditions of post-Hurricane Katrina crisis and recovery, a process that is displacing black residents and remaking the 'resilient' city as a white and middle-class space. Resilience as a concept has the potential to enable different futures by rendering visible these disjunctures between 'official imaginaries' and everyday life and experiences of times and spaces (Jupp, 2020).

### 3 Reworking

We situate the 'reworking' in Katz's (2001a) triad as a gesture towards the efforts to think and to create different kinds of worlds. Reworking involves the revalorising of creative or performative moments of subjectivity-in-the-making, situating the analyst as part of the work, and helping to bring new possibilities into being. Reworking implies imagining and enacting alternative forms of politicisation (of 'being-political') and indeed alternative political forms, which are neither modes of resistance wholly outside structures of power or wholly inside and therefore 'co-opted' into structures not of our own making. Reworking, then, is a concept that invites us to focus on new terrains of feminist politics, which are neither wholly inside nor wholly outside these structures, if they ever were.

We use reworking here to highlight how feminist theoretical and political projects further mobilise situated, process-oriented accounts of change. This is evident in research on the importance of affective and emotional labour in the new economy, which suggests that gender is increasingly valued as a performance, implying new temporal relationships of flexibility and potentiality over static notions of essence or property (Adkins, 2004). It is also apparent in work on the corporeal and biological dimensions of experience, which further challenge the fiction of the 'disembodied individual' (Longhurst, 2001) by situating temporal and spatial concepts of generation, transformation and

change developed in the natural sciences as resources for feminist politics (Alaimo, 2016; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2007; Grosz, 2011; Parisi, 2004). It directs our attention more specifically to research in the life sciences, which is transforming conventional feminist conceptions of the sites and relations of production and reproduction within the domain of biotechnology and its application within and beyond reproductive medicine (Cooper and Waldby, 2008; Thompson, 2007). In so doing, this work pushes us to consider efforts to enact new politics in new ways. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010: 22) write,

it is becoming evident that changes in living matter are rendering obsolete many of the conventional ethical categories used to evaluate them. As scientists succeed in bridging species, artificially creating and extending human and animal life, and manipulating and synthesizing genes to create new life forms, they muddle the concepts and boundaries that are the ground for much ethical and political thinking.

We assert that feminist scholarship, particularly in these emergent domains, has not simply unsettled the concepts and boundaries that ground our thinking but proposed new ways to *rework* them for new forms of ethics and politics.

These new forms of ethics and politics suggest the generative possibilities of re-engaging with diverse ‘others’: in Donna Haraway’s (2003) terms, the ‘naturecultures’ that make up our lived and conceptual worlds; for Sylvia Wynter (1995: 8, cited in McKittrick, 2006: 135) the ‘interhuman and environmental’ histories through which ‘new forms of life’ can emerge. Although debates over the relevance of new materialist thinking for feminist geography have not played out as visibly in the pages of geography journals as in other academic publications (see Ahmed, 2008; Davis, 2009; Sullivan, 2012; Van der Tuin, 2008), this is not to say that concerns about the political import of new materialism or of the non-human, the vital and

the geological as material forces have been ignored (see Boyer and Spinney, 2016; Colls, 2012; Dixon, 2015; Yusoff, 2018). Rather, as Kate Boyer’s (2012) work on breastfeeding in public demonstrates, attention to the affective and corporeal dimensions of spatial practice can shed light on the relays of forces and condensations of tangible bodies and intangible atmospheres (following Sarah Ahmed) that make up a public health problem. This suggests the possibilities of new alliances between feminist politics and the bio-, geo- and other natural scientific research domains that are tracking material transformations in worlds, such as in Farhana Sultana’s (2013) analysis of the material agencies of arsenic and water in the Bangladeshi development ‘waterscape’ or Sarah Whatmore and Catharina Landström’s (2011) research on the politics and science of flood risk management.

The ‘turn’ to the subjects and objects of natural sciences as both an object of renewed interest and a space for political and theoretical work in the discipline has been extraordinarily productive. Some of this work is motivated by an interest in developing conceptual frames for understanding technological transformations in both living and non-living matter that purport to tell us who we are or direct us to what we will become. For others, it is a profound sense of the need to unsettle the foundational place accorded to human life and human activity in political thinking in order to open space for others. For example, Deborah Dixon et al.’s (2012) writings on the work of artist Perdita Phillips develop new ways to envision alternative affective and material alliances with non-humans: with bird species whose mating behaviour seems to share human capacities for ‘expressivity’ and with bacterial colonies whose life-worlds demonstrate a fruitful ‘engendering of bodies that are not necessarily gendered’ (p. 294). We could extend this insight to work that dwells on the interiors of bodily spaces, in which discussions of hormonal flows (Roberts,

2013), bodily morphologies (Colls and Fannin, 2013) and synaptic function (Callard and Margulies, 2011) signal bodily differences not fully captured by notions of a singular gendered identity or stable, 'biological' sex, to name two of the foundational concepts that have long appeared central to feminist scholarship.

The reworking of relations between bodies, knowledges and material-affective processes are indebted to the significant contributions of feminist thinkers and other scholars of science, technology and nature. Feminist politics and theory have always been heterogeneous and cross-fertilising fields, and stories of new materialist feminism's emergence should also be alert to the feminist scholarship that often gets left out of its 'founding gestures' (Ahmed, 2008). For example, Niamh Moore (2011) asks us to consider what might shift in political genealogies of feminism if we return to the underacknowledged articulations of ecofeminists and their geographies of international struggle. Moore's work suggests that pronouncements about the 'end of global sisterhood' in the late 1990s were premature closures of the novel ways in which political alliances were being reworked in light of new sensibilities towards human/non-human ecologies. She draws our attention to the 'linked specificities' that bring together activist imaginaries, site-specific struggles and political sympathies across space and in eclectic and potentially creative ways, rewriting a genealogy of feminist theory and practice. More recently, Katherine McKittrick (2021) excavates how scientific knowledge – its concepts, tools, technologies and languages – are reworked by black writers and artists to imagine and practice liberation. Rereading the work of feminist scholars of science and technology alongside critics of biological determinism to ask '*where* we know science from' (p. 131), McKittrick tracks how racial science and its social constructionist critique relies on a recursive loop that returns, repetitively and descriptively, to the scene of racial hierarchy and black death. Finding other genealogies and

methods of reading scientific knowledge that are affectively, physiologically and intellectually attuned to the geographies of black life offers up an alternative future, the experience of which McKittrick describes through her work, friendship and collaboration with Sylvia Wynter as 'a kind of terrifying openness that promises a different future and this future is outside what we have been taught to recognize as liberation' (p. 72).

Reworking also signals for us the desire to rethink the underlying temporal frames through which feminism's passing is imagined. Alternative performances of time may indeed be a vitally important part of our ecological futures if we are to find new ways to coordinate with the temporalities of other beings and with the deep geologic time of the planet (Bastian, 2012; Clark, 2008). Indeed, gestures towards a future that is unknown, uncertain and a source of speculation – the futurity of 'Feminism and futurity' in our title – suggest greater attention should be paid to the reworking of ecologies, forms of labour and the very material of time itself (see also Adkins, 2008, 2009). These examples suggest two important insights: the first is that an attention to the specificity of concept-worlds – the worlds that shape what is intelligible and subject to critical analysis and what is deemed worthy of commitment – demonstrates the generative power of language but also of the need to acknowledge how these same concepts and methods may even lose their critical edge. Joan Scott's (1999) work on the concept of 'gender' is apposite here: gender theorists and proponents of gender as a useful analytical construct could not have predicted or directed its intellectual and political trajectory. The second is that these examples work against the pronouncements of feminism's demise by suggesting alternative affective and material channels for solidarity, for taking risks and for experimenting with new ways of imagining political affinities. It is this future-oriented horizon of possibility, this effort to rethink the disciplinary



and institutional interstices between feminist theory, liberation politics and scientific and ecological knowledge, that belies the suggestion that feminist theory and practice is no longer relevant for analysing political, economic and social transformations.

## IV Conclusion

Resistance, resilience and reworking: these are all concepts feminist scholars are deploying in new ways. They offer a useful alternative to the linear temporality of generational 'waves' that tends to obscure the diversity of feminism's past, present and future. In arguing for a new diagnosis of this historical moment, we do not wish to make a socio-structural argument (i.e. the world has changed, so our concepts have changed) but rather to suggest that resistance, resilience and reworking are three simultaneous and different ways of thinking about the new political spaces and subjectivities that contemporary feminist scholarship is excavating. By considering each in turn, we have sought to reveal the emerging, performative and generative moments that are being explored within geography and how these enable us to transcend forms of binary thinking that reify difference and stymie opportunities for radical social change.

In this article, we have used the concept of futurity to reveal the historical and theoretical linkages that support restrictive and narrow understandings of the feminist subject and attend to the process or activity of subject-formation as 'a constantly evolving experience' (Worth, 2009: 1058). In doing so, we have sought to position feminist theory and politics not as a static or singular movement or project but as that which has the vitality to animate social change through open-ended invention and the desire to bring a different future into existence. We have drawn on geographical 'countertopographies' that foreground relations and subjects-in-information to disrupt the

presentation of feminism as homogenous or monolithic, a characterisation which reduces feminism to something unrecognisable to many feminist scholars (see also Pratt, 2004; Wright, 2010a, 2010b).

Grosz's contribution to rethinking time and temporality for feminist thought and politics offers a way to open up the future to invention and to new forms of feminist knowledge production. We bring Grosz's work into conversation with Katz's theorisation of resistance, resilience and reworking as a countertopography of feminist politics, outlining how contemporary scholarship attends to subjects-in-information. We celebrate work (of both those who identify as feminists and those whose work is a resource for feminist political thinking) that does not dismiss or trivialise that which does not fit with preconceived imaginings of a feminist future but seeks instead to name and rework theoretical concepts underpinning the ability to envisage change. Indeed, it is this richness of feminist scholarship across geography that convinces us that, despite apocalyptic pronouncements, feminism is neither yesterday's scholarship nor yesterday's politics.

## Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this article was presented at the end of an UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Seminar Series entitled 'Feminism and Futurity: New Times, New Spaces' which the three of us organised with Wenfei Winnie Wang. The authors would like to acknowledge the financial support received for this series, along with the many helpful discussions they had with seminar series participants. Further valuable feedback was received following submission to *Progress in Human Geography*. The critical reactions and suggestions received from the editors and reviewers were key in helping to clarify the arguments presented in this article.


## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC Grant Reference: RES-451-26-0789).

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## Note

1. Revising this essay in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are reminded of the proliferation of mutual aid groups and other crisis-driven efforts to organise street, neighbourhood and community support and care. The enduring effects of these efforts are still unknown but have been cited as evidence of the resilience of collective (non-state, non-capitalist) action (see Spade, 2020; Springer, 2020).

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